

**Letter from Archbishop Dmitry (Ascension) to Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky)  
Calling to Join the Moscow Patriarchate**

December 16, 1946

Your Eminence,

Dear brother, a long-time close companion of the heart - Master,

Most Reverend Metropolitan Anastasius!

Leaving Harbin on September 15/28 at the Patriarch's invitation, I shared my good intentions with a few close faces there: at the first opportunity, to visit Your Eminence for a personal conversation or, at least, correspond with you. It's been almost two months since I arrived in Moscow, but I haven't been able to arrange a visit to you, so I am resorting to writing this letter.

Oh, how I wish we could be together again! And how difficult it is to put everything on a sheet of paper... In June 1945, four Harbin hierarchs, still under the not-so-easy and certainly not gentle hand of Japanese authority, telegraphically asked Patriarch Alexy to take us under his holy hand (the late Metropolitan Meletius, Archbishop Nestor, myself, and the second Harbin vicar, Bishop Juvenal) and have since commemorated him in our prayers. In September, representatives sent by the Patriarch, then Bishop Eleutherius and Priest G. Razumovsky, arrived and performed the prescribed ceremony. As you probably know by now, at that time, very little was known about you personally or other members of the Synod Abroad, especially from the very beginning of the war, for about a year.

It should be noted that our joining was mainly prompted by the fact that, from the end of 1944, we started receiving by mail—addressed to Metropolitan Meletius—issues of the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate. From these journals, month after month, we began to read about the conditions under which hierarchs and clergy from the Renovationist movement were being received by the patriarchal Church. Until then, we were almost certain that the Patriarchal and Renovationist churches were variations within the same basic type. However, as the journal's books, one after another, brought reports that the Moscow Renovationist hierarchy was not recognized, and even bishops were being received in status quo ante, sometimes as priests, or even lay monks, our concerns began to dissipate. The elections and enthronement of Patriarch Alexy himself, you could say, finally reassured us. (Personally, I was greatly impressed by the interview from March 16, 1945, in the "Shanghai Dawn" newspaper, which I read in the office of Bishop John of Shanghai, where Bishop John categorically spoke in favor of the canonical nature of the election and enthronement of Metropolitan Alexy, only dismissing the question of the subordination of the Far East to him.)

And once again, personally for me, it was a great relief and joy that the ruling figure, and the Angel of the Church in Harbin, was indeed Vladyka Meletius. As cautious and deliberate as he had been before on such occasions, here, in the entire history of our joining, he was even eager,

and most importantly, deeply moved. He cried at all the crucial moments, and he cried a lot, but at the end, he rejoiced like a child. At the same time, he was deliberately humble and obedient. The Lord clearly and tangibly guided him with His Right Hand. This was evident in the struggle against the worship of Amaterasu-Oomikami, where the main document, the Archpastoral message of the three Harbin hierarchs, was composed by him and only passed (being issued underground) because of his high authority and direct reverence for him among the Chinese people and the Japanese, including their authorities. Two mystical dreams were of great importance to him, in which he was instructed to get out of the mire, relying on double support (before that, he was very yielding towards the Bureau for Emigrant Affairs and the Eparchial Council in solidarity with it).

I am inclined to consider the sunset of his life as the end of a righteous man. He was buried on the fourth day; the deceased looked warm. No signs of decay, and on the third day, two doctors were deliberately called by those around—could it be lethargy? And they unequivocally recognized it as death. Meanwhile, he did not seem dried up; rather, they thought, did he have dropsy? And yet, for a good four years, he suffered severely (the nerve nodes were affected), and no one ever heard a word of complaint from him...

And how the Lord preserved Archbishop Nicholas of Harbin during his time! When the Red Army was advancing towards Harbin, they sent three squadrons there for bombing. The third was stopped by the beginning truce; the first found the city under a thick cloud cover; the second was met with thunder, lightning, and a storm... And Harbin did not suffer, just as it did not suffer during the change of the two previous authorities. The military spoke about it when entering Harbin.

So, on 23/12, it will be exactly two months since I, with my companion Hieromonk Joseph, have been in Moscow. During this time, I underwent surgery: the fused vocal cords were cut, and some membrane on them as well. In recent months and years, I served as a soprano, and now the former bass is gradually returning, currently at notes 7-8. I want to try homeopathic treatment a bit. In February, they operated on the bladder. But I feel decent, and for my 75 years, you could say, thank God, quite well. Moscow, of course, is difficult for me to recognize: after all, I essentially left it after finishing seminary in 1893, and I haven't met anyone familiar, except for Father Alexei Stanislavsky, whom I parted with in Kharkov in 1909, and then it's all entirely new. For these two months, I've been living in the parish of Resurrection of the Word, in Bryusov Lane. I've gotten to know some of the parishioners a bit. Also, vocal training brings me closer to some people, little by little.

In Harbin, I have left: my son Filaret (44 years old). I now hear that Metropolitan Nestor has appointed him as the deputy of the Kazan [Male] Monastery, apparently under the abbot Father Innocent, almost his former disciple, because Bishop Juvenal, as I was told in the Patriarchate, is being sent somewhere in the USSR. My daughter Elena, with her husband and son (18 years old), remains in Harbin, and in Shanghai, my other daughter, Nun Magdalena, with whom I have had no correspondence for over a year. Life for the Russian population in China, especially in Harbin,

seems to be much worse now, and currently, the correspondence has been interrupted again: "no exchange," as noted by the post office when returning our letters sent 1-2 months ago. Unpleasant concerns involuntarily creep in—for my close relatives and for the former flock with whom we lived together for 26 years.

...But it's time to return to the question I touched upon at the beginning of the letter. Bishop, dear and beloved! It's time, it's necessary to be with you again... And I will say again: it will not be the same when you replace a live, personal conversation with written correspondence. A week ago, I received two telegrams from America—one from Metropolitan Theophilus and another from a congress, it seems, in Pittsburgh—and both essentially speak of the recognition of Patriarch Alexy as the head of the Russian Church abroad. Of course, more accurately, one must think that not all of America will join here; of course, a significant part may remain under Archbishop John of Shanghai, both laity and clergy. However, the division still remains, and at the same time, the circle around those departing is getting tighter and tighter. And, a priori speaking, there should be more and more substantial justifications for this than before. That's why, while we had the right to justify, even during the last Hitlerian war, that at its core, or maybe in the mass, there were living people, not Renovationists, but now, as it seems, the attention to the essence of this justification is required more than ever. Why, when they pointed out to me in 1943 (or maybe in 1942) that Soviet Russia is now fighting for the Motherland, I demanded evidence, exposing that it is not Renovationists but Tikhonites, or at least so-called semi-Tikhonites, then it might be possible to talk about uniting with them. Still, neither you nor anyone else can present evidence to me. (This was discussed in Harbin behind the impenetrable Japanese wall, and the speaker was a Cyrillic legitimist, according to my not unfounded conviction—contra-legitimist, from the point of view of the fundamental Russian laws—during the last Hitlerian war.)

Agree, dear and sincerely respected Bishop, now we are facing something completely different, and honestly, it is entirely opposite. The merit of the Bolshevik party—something unprovable, but life and the real reality, guided and directed by God's Providence, proved that it is a historical fact of the obvious salvation of our Motherland Russia. The sins of the past from that party, significant sins, but not solely lying on it, have long been washed away not only operationally but also specifically by the blood of the sons of the same Soviet Russia. The clergy in Moscow are not Renovationists but traditionally and widely Tikhonites. For this, I, having lived in Moscow for almost two months, testify with my conscience and consider myself entitled to testify. As for the rest—is it worth writing about?! From a fly to an elephant (there are many masters to make them), but I think this art has not yet touched us.

May the Lord keep you, and may He soften and strengthen you with the wisdom of Christian love.

Yours always, with love in Christ,

Archbishop DMITRY

P.S. Recently, I heard that in the jurisdiction under your Eminence in the Overseas, there are now so few actual dioceses that it has created difficulties for naming, especially—but not limited to—bishops as "Bishop so-and-so." I came to the Patriarchate, where there are dozens of dioceses, and yet I could not find a single one to be traditionally called by (like the God-pleasing Innocent of Irkutsk or later his successor in the Mission—Pereyaslavsky). I think this is also not without God's will. (Until January 194... I was called a bishop, and then an archbishop of Khailar from 1944.)

### **References**

[1]. A.A. Kostryukov, *Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1936-1694: Administrative Structure and Relations with the Church in the Homeland* (Moscow: St Tikhon's Orthodox University of Humanities, 2015), 420-423.